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# ORGANIZE THE UNORGANIZED

BY  
WM. Z. FOSTER

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## **Organize the Unorganized**

BY

**WM. Z. FOSTER**

*"Organization does not happen; it is made to happen."*



## Chapter I.

### IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIZING THE UNORGANIZED.

THE question of organizing the many millions of unorganized workers is the most vital matter now before the American labor movement. The future progress of the working class depends upon the solution of this great problem.

The organization of the unorganized is a life and death question for the labor movement. To bring the millions into the unions is necessary not only for the protection of the of the unorganized workers, and to further class ends in general, but also to safeguard the life of the existing organizations. Many of the trade unions are now under such heavy attacks from the employers that their very existence is threatened. These struggles can be resolved favorably to the workers only by drawing to their support the great mass of unorganized.

The Miners' Union is a case in point. The bituminous coal industry is shifting from the organized fields of Illinois, Ohio, Indiana and Pennsylvania, into the southern unorganized districts, with consequent heavy unemployment among the union miners. The coal operators are taking advantage of this fact by smashing the union in the organized districts. Unless the southern fields are unionized, the United Mine Workers of America is doomed.

#### Unions in Danger.

To a greater or lesser extent similar menacing conditions exist among the unions of Railroad Workers, Metal Workers, Needle Workers, etc. They are not only seriously weakened, but they cannot even exist with such large sections of their industries working under non-union conditions.

The organization of the unorganized masses will mean a tremendous step forward to the general revolutionizing of the labor movement. At present the unions have only 3,500,000 workers out of a total of at least 20,000,000 who are organizable. Doubling or tripling the total number of organized workers will, merely by the increased weight of organized labor alone, enormously enhance its power and stimulate all its institutions.

But, bringing the masses into the unions means much more than simply to add them numerically to the number of organized workers. Far more important will be the consequent changing in the composition of the unions and the shifting of their centers of gravity into the heavy and key industries.

#### Will Create a New Spirit of Progress.

The overwhelming bulk of the unorganized masses are semi-skilled and unskilled. They are the most proletarian and revolutionary section of the working class. Of the 3,500,000 organized workers, fully one-half are highly skilled. They dominate the whole movement and color it and restrict it with their craft prejudices and petty bourgeois conceptions. A great influx of the at present unorganized semi-skilled and unskilled workers will drown out these unhealthy tendencies and start the movement in the direction of revolutionary development. The newly organized workers, with no craft interests to preserve, will tend strongly in the direction of industrial unionism—the organization of the unorganized will mean a great surge forward towards the amalgamation of the existing organizations.

It will also mean a powerful development of the Labor Party movement, partly through the increased class consciousness given to the movement by the addition of the masses of semi-skilled and unskilled, partly because of the intensification of the class struggle accompanying the organization of the unorganized, and partly because the increased size of the labor movement will furnish a better foundation for the Labor Party—where the unions are only skeleton in form, the existence of a powerful Labor Party is almost out of the question.

Also, the very progress of bringing the millions of semi-skilled and unskilled into the unions will provoke a whole series of struggles against the employers and will enormously increase

the militancy of the labor movement. The present epoch of militancy and class conscious development in the British movement was hastened very much by infusing into the old conservative skilled workers' craft unions many hundreds of thousands of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. And a similar result will be produced on the unions in the United States by bringing in the unskilled.

#### Into the Basic Industries.

A further vital consideration is that the organization of the unorganized masses will tend to revolutionize the labor movement by establishing its foundations in the basic and other important industries. At the present time the trade unions are strongest in the lighter industries, such as building, printing, clothing, etc. Where they touch the basic industries, as on the railroads, in the coal mines, they are either confined largely to the skilled workers, or their hold on the masses in general is weak.

The big industries present a deplorable lack of trade union organization: railroads 35%, coal mining 40%, general metal 5%, general transport 10%, metal mining 5%, steel 3%, textiles 10%, leather 15%; while practically no organization exists at all in the meat packing, automobile, electrical supplies, lumber, agricultural machinery, etc. A trade union movement so weak in the big and basic industries of the country cannot possibly make an effective struggle against capitalism. The firm establishment of the unions in these industries by organizing the great masses will enormously increase the strength of the labor movement and throw it at the very heart of capitalism. It will imbue the entire organization with a new understanding and a new fighting spirit.

The organization of the unorganized is of tremendous importance to the left wing. It tends to revolutionize the labor movement, to make it more responsive to left wing slogans, and to generally create a more favorable situation in which the left wing can operate. Moreover, in the organization process, by taking an active lead in the campaign, the left wing will win direct leadership over large sections of the newly organized masses, for whoever organizes the workers leads them. It will also give the left wing invaluable experience in mass work and leadership.



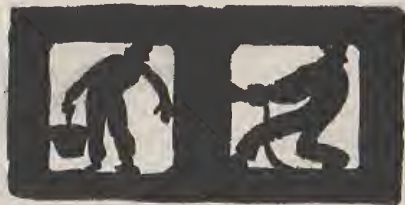
We must realize the vital importance of the great campaign of organization and the leading role the left wing has to play in it.

The present period presents an exceptionally favorable time to bring the unorganized masses into the unions. Industry is going ahead at a relatively high rate. The workers are bitterly exploited, their standards of living are not advancing. In fact, in many industries such as textile, mining, shoe—in spite of the prosperity of the employers, the workers are facing wage cuts. There is much discontent in their ranks. The situation is ripe for a great drive for organization. The present period of “prosperity” cannot last indefinitely. Already there are signs of its weakening. We must take the fullest advantage of the situation now. The workers are in a mood to organize. We must take the lead and show them how.

#### A Favorable Opportunity.

Failure of the union to strengthen their ranks now by the inclusion of vast masses of the unorganized, will expose them to the most deadly dangers in the slack industrial period that is not far ahead, when the employers will renew their “open shop” campaign of destruction against the unions with redoubled vigor.

The Trade Union Educational League is fundamentally correct when it places as “Point 1” in its Program of Action, the initiation of a general campaign to organize the millions of unorganized workers.



## Chapter II.

### THE LEFT WING MUST DO THE WORK.

THE organization of the unorganized millions of workers is primarily the task of the left wing. There is no other section of the labor movement possessing the necessary courage, energy, and understanding to carry through this basic work. This is a prime lesson that T. U. E. L. militants must understand.

The three general groups in the trade union movement play essentially the following roles in the gigantic task of organizing the unorganized masses: The left wing militantly leads, the progressives mildly support, and the right wing opposes.

The left wing alone has a realization of the tremendous social significance of the organization of the unorganized. It speaks primarily in the name of the unskilled and semi-skilled who make up the mass on the outside of the unions, and it habitually leads a militant struggle to unionize them. It is the champion of industrial unionism and the Labor Party, the fate of both of which is bound up in the general question of organizing the unorganized. It realizes that only when the great masses are mobilized in the unions can effective assaults be made against capitalism. Hence, it is the life of every organizing campaign, and it must be such, whether these campaigns are carried on through the medium of the existing trade unions, or by the launching of new organizations.

The progressives primarily represent the skilled, and, to a certain degree, the semi-skilled workers. They usually mildly favor and support general campaigns of organization. They have some appreciation of the importance of bringing the masses into the unions, but they haven't the necessary understanding and militancy to do the actual work. They must be stimulated into action by the left wing.

They lack the leadership to map out and carry through the broad, daring campaigns necessary for the organization of the masses in American industries. They fear the militant and des-



perate strikes which must accompany such campaigns. They are class collaborationists, they are afflicted with many of the craft prejudices and much of the conservatism of the right wing. But, under the pressure of the left wing, they can be pushed into doing effective organizing work.

The essential form of an organizing committee or movement under present conditions in the American labor movement is a united front between the left wing and the progressives, with the left wing functioning as the driving force.

### **Sabotage by the Right Wing.**

The right wing controlling bureaucrats are the real stumbling block to organization. They primarily represent the skilled workers. They fear that the organization of the unorganized masses of semi-skilled and unskilled will overwhelm the organized skilled workers. The bureaucrats want to maintain craft lines and craft interests, in wage scales, in organization forms, and in various other ways, and they know that the influx of the unorganized mass will tend to wipe out these special interests. They know that the struggle to organize the unorganized will compel the skilled workers to abandon their class collaboration policies, and they fear it will force them into fights against the employers that will jeopardize their craft organizations and preferred wage scales.

They know that with the mass organized, the skilled workers will not be able to trade so successfully at the expense of the unskilled workers, as, for example, the Railroad Brotherhoods and many other unions are now doing. The right wing bureaucrats fear the unskilled will flood the unions and capture them from the skilled. They dread the influx of the mass because it means a general disturbance of the equilibrium in the organizations, the rise of new leaders, and probably their own displacement. They sense the general revolutionizing effect of the influx of semi-skilled and unskilled workers into the unions, and they shrink from it.

Hence, the right wing bureaucracy is ordinarily opposed to the organization of the unorganized, except along their narrow craft lines, where they often display organizing activity. Their policy is to set up bars against apprentices, against helpers, and

to develop their unions into job trusts. They concentrate in certain industries easy to organize, such as the Electrical Workers' Union, confining itself principally to the building trades; the Metal Trades Unions, specializing on the railroads, while they neglect other industries "hard" to organize.

Even when driven into organizing campaigns by pressure, the right wing bureaucrats refuse to lend them real support. At best they then only trail along. Their policy is one of sabotage. They are affected by a hundred petty craft considerations, and they raise innumerable technical and other objections in order to hinder the organizing work. Often they co-operate with the employers to prevent organization. They usually will accept mass organization if it is "handed to them on a silver platter" by the left wing organizers, but they will not go out and fight for it. They are lazy, unimaginative, corrupt and petty bourgeois. The left wing must consider and deal with them as a major obstacle in the work of organizing the unorganized.

### **Stimulating the Trade Unions Into Action.**

It would be a grievous error, however, to conclude from the foregoing that the right wing can block the organization of the unorganized by the trade unions and that nothing can be done in these bodies. A whole series of organization campaigns by the trade unions belie this pessimism. The impulse of the labor movement to expand into a real mass and class organization is very powerful. Where there is an insistent and intelligent demand from the combined left wing and progressives, the right wing can literally be driven into organizing campaigns. This is what was done to Gompers and the presidents of the various internationals in the steel and packing industry campaigns. And on the railroads the more progressive elements were responsible for the organization of hundreds of thousands of the unorganized during the war period.

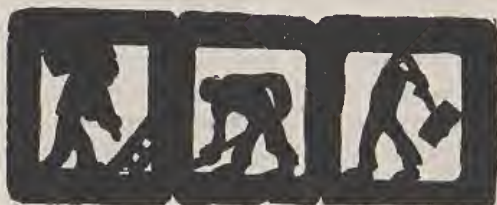
The right wing bureaucrats find it exceedingly difficult to fight directly against the demand for organization. Their method is mostly indirect. They commonly adopt organization resolutions, presented by the more progressive elements, and then sabotage them to death. They do lip service to the organization of the unorganized and then prevent it in practice. The American



Federation of Labor has adopted, from time to time, resolutions for the organization of every industry in the country, and immediately after the conventions has promptly forgotten all about them.

In the struggle against the right wing over the question of organizing the unorganized, two principal dangers confront the left wing, both of which must be guarded against. The first is a pessimistic conclusion that the trade unions cannot be stimulated to do organization work. The second, the other extreme, is a naive, over-optimistic belief that the right wing will put into effect the adopted resolutions calling for the organization of the unorganized.

Both of these tendencies block real organization work. The proper policy in the trade unions is for the left wing to enter into alliance with the progressive elements, to force the adoption of programs of organization, and then themselves to do the actual work of organizing, in spite of the sabotage of the right wing. The theme of this chapter is correct; upon the left wing rests primarily the burden of organizing the unorganized.



### Chapter III.

#### THE A. F. OF L. AND INDEPENDENT UNIONS.

A MOST important question for T. U. E. L. militants to understand in order to carry through successfully our work of organizing the unorganized, is our relationship to the A. F. of L. and Independent Unions. Our goal must be to build mass labor organization of the workers, and to bring or maintain these unions in affiliation with the general labor movement, the American Federation of Labor. This involves the two-sided policy of: (a) stimulating the existing unions into organizing campaigns; and (b) forming new unions in industries where there are no unions or where the existing unions are hopelessly decrepit. The two evils we have to guard against are on the one side, the devil of dual unionism, and on the other, the dogma of unity with the old trade unions "at any price."

The advantages of bringing the newly organized workers into the existing labor movement are manifest, save in certain exceptional cases. In most instances positive and direct support for these workers in their initial crucial struggles is gained by such affiliation. But even where this is not the case, there are certain negative advantages of affiliation to the A. F. of L. For one thing, the workers are shielded from the disastrous attacks of the bureaucracy, which are always leveled against dual unions. To a certain extent, also, the conservative name of the A. F. of L. saves the workers from the attacks of the employers and the state, even though their policies be as militant as those of any independent union.

But perhaps the most important asset of affiliation to the A. F. of L. is the feeling of the newly organized workers that they are connected up with the mass labor movement of the country. This ordinarily gives them far greater confidence and staying power. It is a feeling they do not acquire in independent unions. Among a certain section of unorganized workers there is a deep hostility towards the American Federation of Labor. The T. U.



E. L. militants must not allow themselves to be dominated by this antagonism. They must and can liquidate it wherever the interests of the workers dictate that they shall be affiliated to the A. F. of L. unions.

#### Formation of New Unions.

In the industries where there are no A. F. of L. unions our course is clear. We must form new unions and bring them into affiliation with the broad labor movement as quickly as practicability permits. Or if there be independent unions in such industries we must give them our active support and work for their affiliation to the A. F. of L. In those fields where the I. W. W. functions more or less effectively, such for example as among the lumber, general construction, and agricultural workers, we must support it.

In industries where there are A. F. of L. unions, but where these unions are so weak and decrepit, with corrupt leadership, hidebound agreements, etc., that it is impossible to stimulate them into the necessary activity to mobilize the mass militant organization campaigns or to defend their interests in strikes arising therefrom, our problem is more complicated. There the advantage of affiliation may easily be outweighed by the disadvantages. Such situations raise the question of independent unionism in its most intricate form. In spite of our most urgent desire for unity with the general labor movement, we will often, under these circumstances, be compelled to form independent unions.

But wherever we form such new unions, whether because there are no A. F. of L. unions in the field or because those that may exist are absolutely decrepit, we must from the outset follow a program for the affiliation of these unions to the A. F. of L. We must be keenly on our guard not to get into a dual union position, by declaring against the A. F. of L. in principle or by permitting an open warfare to develop against it. Experience teaches us that dual unionism means sectarianism, isolation from the broad labor movement, and eventually disintegration. One of the outstanding contributions of the Communist International and the Red International of Labor Unions to the American labor movement is their categorical condemnation of dual unionism.

Dualism must be fended off by a two-sided policy of: (a),

teaching the membership of the new unions from the start that their place is in unity with the mass of workers in the A. F. of L.; and (b), to begin a series of maneuvers to get into affiliation with the A. F. of L.

#### The Fight for Affiliation.

Such a policy is bound to be successful. On the one hand it checks the dangerous and ever-present spirit of sectarianism, and on the other hand it either leads to amalgamation and affiliation, or it gives the new union many of the advantages of affiliation by breaking up the official bureaucratic opposition. When per-capita-tax-hungry trade union officials see a fat independent union that wants to affiliate to their organization, they are much inclined to look upon it with some degree of friendliness and tolerance, even though, for the time being, they are afraid to accept its affiliation. Negotiations for affiliation by independent unions give them standing in the broad labor movement by making that movement understand that the new union feels itself to be a part of the main body of organized labor. This, in turn, strengthens the rank and file of the new union by a knowledge of the general friendliness of the mass labor movement.

But while militantly propagandizing amalgamation and maneuvering for its accomplishment, the new unions must make every effort to work in harmony with the old unions, by the initiation of joint organization campaigns, by assisting them in their strikes, etc. Its aim must be to generally create a spirit of friendly co-operation which shall culminate in an amalgamation.

Where independent unions have been set up, and especially where there are already existing A. F. of L. unions in the field, our greatest danger comes from a dual union tendency to repel the old organizations and to maintain an independent existence of the new union. This bases itself upon various illusions and wrong policies, such as utopian hopes for the future of the new union, under-estimation of the power and importance of the old unions, the tendency to seek reasons to quarrel with the old unions rather than to co-operate with them, neglect of amalgamation and maneuvers to bring about a consolidation, the presentation of impossible programs as the basis of amalgamation or affiliation, etc.



This whole dual union tendency must be relentlessly combatted and the policy pursued of coming more closely into co-operation and affiliation with the old unions. The T. U. E. L. militants must also guard against the opposite tendency of making affiliation with the old unions a fetishism, or develop a "unity-at-any-price" program. Such a policy is wrong and might easily do big damage by resulting in a surrender off-hand of the leadership of strikes, organizing campaigns, and new-formed unions to ultra reactionary leaders who would destroy them.

Often these leaders will propose such terms of affiliation as to make their acceptance tantamount to the sacrifice of the interests of the workers. We must fight for affiliation to the A. F. of L. unions, but we also must fight for honest and militant leadership, and mass industrial organization. Our growing left wing leaders must be provided a place to function in the unions, and above all, at this stage, we must retain the initiative in carrying on the great work of organizing the unorganized.

In working out propositions of affiliation, or operating within the trade unions, these ends must not be lost sight of. One of our most delicate tactical problems will be to judge when we can best further these ends by affiliation to the existing unions, and when it will be necessary to form or maintain independent organizations.

But again I emphasize, the greatest danger that the left wing confronts in such situations is the persistent dual union tendency to pull away from the old unions and to establish new and independent organization which isolate our forces from the main body of organized workers.

#### Jurisdictional Problems.

Under the general head of left wing relationship to the old unions, must be considered the problem presented by the jurisdictional claims of these organizations. First, the question of open jurisdictional fights. In many cases left wingers, taking the points of view of their respective craft unions, become deeply immersed in the jurisdictional quarrels of their organizations, with the result that their arguments and programs are almost indistinguishable from those of the ordinary craft unionist. This is fundamentally wrong. We must rise above such petty, short-

sighted quarrels and base our policy upon the interests of all the workers in the totality of the unions involved.

Then there is the situation, common in many industries, where a score of unions, most of them with little or no organized membership in the industry, claim jurisdiction over the workers of their respective trades in the industry. The left wing cannot support such ridiculous jurisdictional claims, nor can we wait until these reactionary unions decide to amalgamate with stronger and more basic unions in the industry. Sometimes it will be necessary, in such situations, for the left wing to ignore the claims of these dog-in-the-manger unions, and support the basic unions at the expense of the weaker ones.

Thus, for example, in the steel industry, we must at this time insist that the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel & Tin Workers take in all workers in and around the steel mills, regardless of the claims of a score or more of other unions for certain categories of these workers. Also, in the metal industry generally, we must more and more apply such a policy with regard to the Machinists' Union.

In thus precipitating amalgamation from the bottom, and the realignment of the unions according to industrial lines, we must, however, take care not to provoke open jurisdictional struggles between the unions.

In the general problem of our left wing attitude towards the A. F. of L. and the independent unions, the T. U. E. L. policy must be: in industries with strong unions, we shall build up these organizations; in industries with no unions or with incurably decrepit unions, we shall form independent organizations and then affiliate them, or seek persistently to affiliate them to the A. F. of L. This is the basic program which the necessities of the present situation dictate.



## Chapter IV.

### METHODS OF ORGANIZATION.

IN the United States, the task of organizing the workers is an extremely complicated and difficult one. The situation in the industries is not uniform. In industries that are competitive in character, especially where there are established unions or where the workers have a tradition of organization, unions and efforts to organize them are tolerated, or at least not violently persecuted.

In other industries, where the organization and tradition of unionism are weak, and the employers, highly organized, are applying a militant "open shop" policy, the unions are ruthlessly crushed and attempts to establish them are met with an iron repression. This situation necessitates upon our part two general kinds of organizing work, open and secret. Let us first discuss "open" organization work.

#### "Open" Organization Campaigns.

It is possible to carry on "open" trade union organization work in many industries such as on various railroads, in half organized northern coal fields, in the unorganized sections of the building, needle, culinary, and printing trades, and in the general mass of small metal and other competitive industries, where the employers are not strongly organized. In such situations are commonly found trade unions, however weak. Wherever "open" trade union organization is possible, the task of the left wing consists, for the most part, in stimulating the existing unions into carrying on open organizational campaigns among the workers by mass meetings, individual solicitation, etc.

To develop this activity of the old unions necessitates a variety of means. Every phase and stage of the movement must be stirred up on the organization question. In every local union the question of organizing the unorganized must be made a burning one, and committees established to unite the workers. Between

the local unions of one craft, or among those of several crafts in one industry, joint organization campaigns can be established. The Central Labor Councils can also be stirred into action.

A number of years ago the A. F. of L. used to promote in the various cities what were called "Labor Forward" movements. In these all the unions of a given city rallied for a general organizing campaign, many internationals sending in organizers to assist. Often good work was done. The "Labor Forward" type of movement should be revived. Likewise the International Unions, especially at their conventions, can be energized into making national organizing campaigns in their respective jurisdictions, either alone or in co-operation with related unions.

In all this stimulation of the trade unions it must never be lost sight of, however, that the left wing must lead in the actual work of organizing. Simply to pass resolutions calling for organization, and then to leave the matter to the officialdom, is futile. Their policy is to let such resolutions die a quiet death. They cling desperately to old forms and practices. They have to be crowded into action.

The left wing and the progressives must follow up their resolutions by demanding the formation of large organizing committees through which they can carry on actual work of organization. Such committees must know how to force through the necessary reductions of initiation fees, and to generally remove the many barriers which the reactionary leadership has raised against the organization of their fellow workers. They must also know how to mobilize the full financial resources of the unions and to bring the general membership into the organization work. Such organization committees offer splendid opportunities to bring forward the whole T. U. E. L. program and to mobilize all the progressive elements in the unions against the right wing bureaucracy and the employers.

#### "Closed" Organization Campaigns.

There are many other industries, on the other hand, such as steel, textile, rubber, southern coal fields, on many railroads, etc., etc., where unionism has been eliminated and where "open" organization work is practically impossible because of the terrorism of the employers. In these "closed" industries, we must adopt



"secret" or indirect methods of organization.

A most important consideration in these "closed," unorganized industries, is the fact that the left wing must take the initiative in the organizing work, to a far greater extent than in the "open," semi-organized industries. Usually there are no unions at all in the "closed" industries to be stimulated into action and upon whose resources the left wing can draw. The reactionary leaders refuse to tackle these tough industries. Consequently the left wing has to depend primarily upon its own resources and upon its own direct initiative in launching and carrying through the organization campaigns.

In the industries which are "closed" against trade unionism by the terrorism of the employers, our basic method for organizing work must be "secret" or indirect in character. It is true that upon occasion, as in the big organizing campaign among the steel workers in 1918-19, such gigantic efforts can be put forth directly that the workers can be openly mobilized in spite of the most violent opposition by the employers. The left wing must seek to develop such broad, sweeping "open" campaigns. But they are the exception. Most of the work in these industries will have to be done on a relatively small scale, which means more or less underground."

#### Company Unions and Workers' Clubs.

For a long time the trade unions have used "secret" methods of organization in such instances. But their efforts have been crude and ineffective, being usually merely the quiet recruitment of members into local unions which are spy ridden, ordinarily dead of dry-rot, of repression by the employers, or through premature strikes. The left wing will have to be far more skilful in "underground" trade union organization. It must utilize the most diverse forms of proletarian organization in order to secure a basis for the establishment of unions, or for the launching of strike movements which will eventually result in building unions.

One form of organization which must be utilized for this work is the company union. Company unions flourish especially in those industries "closed" to trade unionism. The left wing must carry on a policy of working within these organizations

where they have any degree of mass participation, with the ultimate aim of destroying them and building trade unions.

We must raise economic demands of the workers in these organizations in order to expose their nature as instruments of the employers and to crystallize the discontent of the workers. We must participate in the plant elections in order to sharpen and clarify the struggle of the workers against the employers, and to place our men in strategic positions. At the company union conventions, especially on the railroads, the question of trade unionism can be raised effectively.

The experience during the movement of the steel workers, in 1918-19, when many company unions were captured from the employers, as well as the experience among many other groups of workers shows clearly that these organizations can be utilized for the launching of movements among the workers which culminate in the destruction of the company unions and the formation of trade unions.

Another form of organization valuable for organizing in the "closed" industries, is the various workers' clubs and fraternal organizations in the industrial towns. Made up for the most part of unskilled, foreign-language speaking workers, they readily adapt themselves to supporting drives to organize the local industries. Under cover of these clubs general organizational propaganda can be successfully carried on and committees formed to lay the first foundations of trade union organization for the various factories. In the textile industry, particularly in Passaic, Lawrence, etc., their value has been demonstrated. They are to play an important role in the organization of the great masses of workers.

The left wing must follow a policy of establishing such workers' clubs and fraternal organizations and of winning over those already in existence, especially in cities dominated by one or two industries. This does not mean, however, the inauguration of a campaign to use such clubs as organizing instruments generally in the industries where there are unions. Wherever it is possible to organize openly and directly into the trade unions, we must by all means utilize the opportunity.



### Shop Nuclei and Shop Committees.

The shop nuclei of the Workers (Communist) Party are an organizational form of great importance in the organization of the unorganized workers. These nuclei, distributed widely through the industries and built upon the basis of the respective factories, will prove invaluable contact points for the starting of broad movements for the launching of strikes and the establishment of trade unions. Their factory papers will arouse and educate the workers, giving voice to their demands, organizing the resistance to the company unions, and generally preparing the ground for trade unionism.

The shop committee movement will also be used very profitably in the organization of the workers in the "closed" industries. Among the unorganized workers this movement consists in the formation of committees, more or less informal, representing the workers, department by department and factory by factory. It carries on a struggle for the demands of the workers and for their recruitment into trade unions. In France the shop committee movement among the unorganized workers manifests itself pretty much as an "open" movement. In the United States, however, it will be very largely a semi-"secret" movement in its earlier stages. The value of the shop committee movement among the unorganized has been demonstrated in the textile industry. In the struggle to organize the unorganized it will play an increasingly important part.

### Combining Different Forms.

Under certain circumstances, all these various forms of proletarian organization, such as workers' clubs, fraternal organizations, shop nuclei, shop committees, etc., can be joined together in united front movements, thus uniting all the threads of "underground" organization and facilitating the creation of open trade unions. Even the representatives of company unions should be admitted to such united front committees unless there are special reasons for excluding them.

All these proletarian organizations will play a big part in the organization of the workers in the "closed" industries. They will also serve to a certain extent in other industries where the em-

ployers are not so hostile but where the workers are simply lethargic. Yet they offer no royal road to organization. Upon occasion the employers will fight them bitterly. They will discharge the workers for militant activities in company unions; they will clean out the shop committee men; they will fire workers for membership in clubs that are showing a tendency towards trade unionism; they will fill all these institutions with detectives. Nevertheless, we must utilize them. They offer the means for a flank attack against the employers, which is necessary considering the weak forces of organized labor in the "closed" industries.

In its organization work, the left wing must aim to work in the "open." When this cannot be done, we must work "underground." The question of determining just how far we can work in the "open" and how much we will have to use the indirect method, will prove one of the most delicate problems we have to solve in our organization campaigns.





## Chapter V.

### ORGANIZATION AND STRIKES.

THE organization of the unorganized on any considerable scale in American industry inevitably precipitates hard-fought strikes. Organization campaigns are the first phase of bitter struggles between the workers and employers over questions of wages, hours, working conditions and the right to organize.

In most industries the acute phase of the struggle, the strike, comes quickly. Usually, when an organization campaign begins, the employers take the initiative and try to nip the movement in the bud by militantly attacking it. But even if they do not follow this course, the workers themselves will soon precipitate the strike struggle by raising their demands against the employers. This basic connection of strikes with organization movements is a foundation fact. All our strategy in the campaign to organize the unorganized turns around it.

#### The Question of Demands.

The first consideration is to center our campaigns of organization around the economic demands of the workers. The unorganized workers have very little understanding of or desire for trade unionism as such. It is only the advanced elements who appreciate the real value of organization. When the masses join unions it is in the hope of securing immediate satisfaction for their burning grievances. They want unions directly for what they can get through them from the employers, and usually they will not wait long for results. Therefore, we must make the fight for the workers' demands the basis of all our tactics in our organization work, bringing in our general left wing program as the struggle develops.

A glaring weakness of conservative trade unionists in attempting to organize the unorganized, is their failure to take into consideration this fact, that the mass of workers have organized themselves in order to fight immediately for their demands. The conservatives stress the purely organizational side too much and

the struggle side too little. They ignore the urgency of the workers' demands. They assume that the mass of workers understand the general value of trade unionism as such. They proceed upon the basis that the workers can be brought into the unions slowly, man by man, and then held there and disciplined indefinitely until the great mass is organized, when, sometime in the distant future, possibly demands will be made on the employers for better conditions.

Such a theory is of course absurd. It always fails in practice, a case in point being the fiasco of the recent A. F. of L. organization campaign in the steel industry.

The future trade unions of the great unorganized industries will be born in the heat of the struggle against the employers over the demands of the workers. The organization campaign which does not voice the demands of the workers and envisage an early struggle in defense of them is doomed beforehand to failure.

The nature of the workers' demands are determined by the state of the industry and the moods of the employers and workers concerned. In periods of slackened industry, with the employers on the offensive, the fight of the workers in their present stage of ideological development will be to maintain existing standards, to struggle against wage cuts, lengthening of the work day, etc. In periods of "prosperity," the workers will fight for better wages, shorter hours, etc. But, in any event, in good times or bad, the struggle for organization must center around the defense of the workers' pressing demands. The workers are especially militant in fighting against reductions of their living standards. The fight against wage cuts is one of the very best issues upon which to organize the workers and to bring them into struggle against the employers.

#### Organization Strategy.

Organization campaigns in American unorganized industries are preparations for strikes. They are a struggle for position between the employers and workers in the big battle that is soon to come, the strike over the establishment of better conditions. It is in this sense that such campaigns must be conceived and carried through.



To prevent the organization of their workers, the employers have a whole arsenal of weapons which they use with skill and ruthlessness. When modern employers cut wages they commonly slash one group of workers at a time, thus breaking up the solidarity of the workers; instead of using the old-time method of making broad-sweeping wage cuts in all departments simultaneously, which united the workers. This canny policy makes the work of the organizer difficult.

The employers also fight the introduction of trade unions by setting up company unions. And when actually confronted with militant organizing campaigns, they try to break them up by granting wage increases, discharging active workers, forcing premature strikes, abolishing free assembly in their company towns, etc. In the steel campaign of 1918-19, for example, the steel trust, to head off the movement, conceded the workers several increases in wages and established the basic 8-hour day, while at the same time carrying on a policy of terrorism against the unions and the workers who joined them.

### Plan, Scope, Spirit.

The T. U. E. L. left wing militants must learn to defeat this anti-union strategy of the employers by the development of a thorough-going strategy of organization in support of the workers' economic demands. The very heart of this strategy is: (a) our organization work must be carefully planned; (b) it must embrace the widest possible scope of workers in each case; (c) it must be accompanied by an inspiring propaganda.

One of the greatest weakness of conservatives in trade union organization work is their policy of dabbling. They simply drift into their campaigns, haphazard and planlessly, wherever some local stir wakes them up a bit. Their efforts are mostly confined to a local and craft basis, with consequent failure. The method of the general office of the A. F. of L. itself is typical. It has never followed a thought-out plan for the organization of the workers. It simply sends its organizers around, hither and yon, wherever strikes happen to develop, and these organizers handle such strikes without regard to the situation in the industry as a whole. This is a policy of following the masses, not leading them.

The left wing must depart radically from such a primitive policy, which is totally unfitted for modern American industry. When we get into an organizing campaign in a given locality or industry, we must do so on the basis of a careful analysis of the whole situation. And we must make a determined effort for the utmost mobilization of our forces for the struggle. We must actually lead in the organization work.

Moreover, when the left wing undertakes an organization campaign it must be made as broad and sweeping as possible. Our aim must be for the organization of the whole industry, and all our strategy must go in that direction. Craftism and localism are totally out of place and must be fought. In most cases, as at the present time in the railroad industry, we will, by analysis, ascertain the opportune time for the organization of the masses and we will work for the necessary nation-wide campaigns.

But where we are caught napping, so to speak, by sudden local strike movements of workers in national industries, we must immediately undertake to spread these movements out on a national scale. The trustified state of American industries prevents a successful fight being made on a local scale except in the most favorable and unusual circumstances.

It must be our special endeavor in all these campaigns to win over and develop the youth, who are the bridge to and uniting force between the masses of foreign-born workers and the American workers.

### Strike Strategy.

We must also accompany our organization work with a militant educational propaganda. We must yearn to raise not only the economic demands of the workers, but also learn to fire the workers with the spirit of revolutionary enthusiasm. Strikes offer ideal opportunities to point out to the workers the full political consequences of the class struggle and to awaken their class spirit and consciousness. One of the failures of conservative trade unionism is its almost total lack of idealism. It fails to arouse the fighting spirit of the workers, which can only be done by militant propaganda.

Successful trade union organizers must be masters of strike strategy. One thing they must know is how to deal a blow at



the employers opportunely. The left wing must learn to hit the employers when they are least able to stand it, and to deliver the attack with a maximum force. The employers are wide awake to this danger and follow the counter policy of trying to force the workers into premature struggles.

This was the policy of the steel trust in the 1918-19 campaign. Gary tried to compel the steel workers to strike in certain localities before the national organization had been completed, by discharging thousands of them. His aim was to demoralize the movement before it got well started. We bitterly resisted this tactic, forcing the attacked points to stand fast under the severest pressure until we could mobilize the rest of the steel workers to support them. Thus we gained most precious time in which to organize. Nevertheless, Gary did succeed in precipitating the strike before we were fully prepared for it.

#### When and How.

On the basis of a careful analysis of the state of the industry and of the condition of the workers' forces, the left wing must learn when to strike and when to organize. Nothing is more disastrous than ill-timed strikes and organization campaigns, which needlessly victimize the workers and break their spirit.

Left wing organizers must learn every phase of the art of mobilizing effectively the masses in struggles against the employers. They must know how to dramatize their strikes and to make them spur the class instincts not only of the workers involved, but of the whole working class. They must understand how to mobilize public sentiment behind their cause, and especially to enlist the support of the trade union movement. They must be experts in the collection and distribution of relief. They must understand the technique of mass picketing and the application of the boycott. They must at all times display unfaltering personal courage.

They must know how to build their trade unions among the inexperienced workers during the strike, and how to take advantage of such big struggles as that in Passaic by organizing the masses in surrounding industries and localities who are inspired by the struggle. In short, they must be practical strike leaders

in order to be effective organizers, and to do this they must take an active part in all the struggles of the workers.

The question of organizing the unorganized becomes daily more pressing. The T. U. E. L. and the left wing generally, have a central part to play in the great developing movement for organization. This part we can play effectively if we will bear in mind the few general principles of organization elaborated above, namely, that the left wing must lead in and do the burden of the organization work, that we must avoid isolation from the organized masses and be prepared to utilize every form of proletarian organization in the "closed" industries to further the establishment of unions.

We must study carefully the state of the industry and the condition of the employers' and the workers' forces, base our organization campaigns upon the economic demands of the workers and at all times keep the fight focussed on these demands, plan our organization campaigns carefully and thoroughly mobilize all our forces to put them into execution, extend our scope of activity over the greatest possible extent of workers, strike the blow at the opportune time, demoralize the enemy, rouse public sentiment with our maneuvers, develop the utmost fighting spirit in our own ranks by our invigorating propaganda, and follow up our victories to the limit by organizing all the workers shaken into action by our big strikes and struggles.

The left wing must take the lead in the organization of the unorganized millions. This is an historic necessity of the situation. We must not falter or fail at our task. It is a time for intelligent, courageous, militant action.





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